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Rev. Jerome Stoffel urges those in the Catholic diocese to offer reminiscences for new history.

100th birthday project will be compiling history of Diocese

By Mary Finch

Deseret News religion writer

The 100th birthday party of the Catholic Diocese of Salt Lake City will be five years long, starting this November.

As part of the celebration, Monsignor Jerome C. Stoffel, archivist, and his assistant, Bernice Mooney, are compiling a new history of the diocese.

The Rev. Stoffel explained that the celebration begins this November because that is the 100th anniversary of Salt Lake City's being established as a vicariate. In 1891, it was granted full status as a diocese.

"It was a procedure in use as the church expanded in the United States," he said.

As the initial mission grew to a group of parishes, a vicariate would be established. "They were still unable to completely handle all the administrative direction they needed, yet were beginning to get on their own."

The vicariate would still be under direction of an archbishop, often some distance away. The vicariate comprised of Salt Lake City and eastern Nevada was under jurisdiction of the archbishop of San Francisco. The Right Rev. Lawrence Scanlan was made bishop in 1887, and became bishop of the new, independent diocese when it was established in 1891.

A committee is just beginning to lay plans for the big celebration in 1991.

"The church in Utah had very slow beginnings," said Monsignor Stoffel. Catholics had been in Utah since pre-settlement days, with the Dominguez-Escalante expedition and as trappers and traders.

Catholic names also crop up among the '49ers, he said, although it is often difficult to ascertain whether they were just traveling through on their way to the gold fields. Johnston's Army in 1858 brought some more Catholics, mainly young immigrants who had joined the Army as a way to get ahead.

The mines and railroad brought the major tide of Catholics, he said. "The Irish had an advantage in immigration, because they could speak the language and could go almost anywhere. And they were rugged individualists." But the mines also brought Slavs, Italians and Greeks.

As part of the history-gathering effort, the archivist's office is asking Catholics to send in reminiscences of the early days of the diocese.

"We're trying to get the personal touch, people remembering," said Monsignor Stoffel. "Things people's grandfathers have told them about, recollected from the past — from memory, first-hand or legend."

Such records are rare, he said.

"Generally Catholics, like others except the LDS, were not exceptional journal-keeping people. That's why so much of what we recover, we have to recover from secondary sources."

"Primary sources didn't generally keep much in the way of records, except the administrative records of the diocese, and even those are quite scarce."

He said a few responses have begun trickling in. "I think that as the thing goes along, it will pick up momentum."

Another part of the history was sending forms to parishes seeking information on local history, either from records or memory.

Now, said Monsignor Stoffel, comes the task of checking out all the information.

Masses commemorating the vicariate centennial will be celebrated in November through January in the diocese's five deaneries, or groups of parishes. Observances include:

—Nov. 15, 6 p.m., St. Francis Church, Provo, for southern part of the Wasatch deanery.

—Nov. 16, 11 a.m., in Notre Dame School in Price, for the southeastern deanery.

—Nov. 22, 5:30 p.m. in St. Joseph Church, Ogden, for the northern deanery.

—Nov. 23, 2:30 p.m. in the Cathedral